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Broad objectives for professional laboratory experiences in teacher education are necessary to avoid haphazard and unimaginative programs. Some objectives (the theoretical basis) should be drawn from the behavioral sciences and then tested practically and refined. The laboratory, through the teacher in charge, must provide numerous and varied learning experiences for the student teacher; a learning experience allows the student teacher to perceive his own behavior in relation to a teaching situation, to modify that behavior if necessary, and to perceive the consequences of his decisions. The responsibility of the teacher in charge is to help in the analysis of these experiences rather than to dictate the responses of the student teacher and to encourage self-confidence and dignity through his own behavior. Through such laboratory training, the student teacher should grow in his ability and confidence to make decisions and in his understanding of his role as a teacher. (A 15-item bibliography is included.) (LP)

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A THEORETICAL BASIS FOR PROFESSIONAL LABORATORY EXPERIENCES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

BY

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FROM THE PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS DIVISION
MID-CONTINENT REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

This monograph is the first in what may be a series to be produced by this Division of the Regional Laboratory. I want to congratulate Dr. Grant Clothier on this contribution and thank Dr. L. O. Andrews for his assistance. We will be looking forward to reactions and responses to this statement and to reports of the results of its being tested out in practice in programs of field experiences in teacher education. It undoubtedly will be revised from time to time as reactions to it and results of testing it are received.

KARL D. EDWARDS
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
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FOREWORD

Several years ago the Committee on Standards for Professional Laboratory Experiences of the Association for Student Teaching attempted to identify the major tasks which might prove necessary in a comprehensive approach to the improvement of standards. One of the first concerns of the Committee was the obvious, but not so frequently recognized, inadequate rationale for student teaching and related experiences. The members shared their awareness and concern about this absence of a comprehensive theoretical analysis, but recognized their own personal inadequacy to fill the gap.

The Committee agreed on several assumptions and observations, such as:

a. A comprehensive theoretical basis for student teaching must be built out of the concepts of several of the related disciplines such as perceptual psychology, personality theory, sociology, and anthropology.

b. Most teacher educators, and certainly those involved with student teaching, do not have extensive scholarship in these related disciplines.

c. The explosion of knowledge so commonly recognized in the physical sciences is also gaining momentum in the behavioral sciences, making the task of maintaining some scholarship in these fields even more difficult.

d. A sound and useful theoretical base has been needed for many years and yet its absence is even more critical in this period of expanding enrollments, conflicts, exploration of new approaches, and new needs in the public schools.

e. An orderly development of a theoretical base would involve the drafting of a preliminary statement together with hypotheses, the actual application of the theory, the testing of the hypotheses, and the refinement of the theory.

f. The personnel necessary for this operation to reach the desired objectives would involve an extensive team of scholars from the related fields and specialists in research and student teaching.

g. The present need is so critical that the process just described cannot possibly be speeded up in time to guide the many decisions which ought to be made before 1970.

In accepting work assignments, one member of the Committee was courageous enough to begin some personal exploration of the problem and some applicable concepts in the related disciplines. Dr. Grant Clothier, then of Central Missouri State College, sought ideas and guidelines from a variety of sources. He has excerpted significant passages and tried to put these together. Finally, he has attempted a brief personal synthesis.

No one recognizes more keenly than he the inadequacy of the resulting statement to do the whole task, but the members of the Association for Student Teaching and others who are concerned with professional laboratory experiences have an obligation to consider this attempt seriously and to set about to see that some of the important next steps are carefully conceived, supported, and carried to completion.

One of the obvious next steps is to gather a small group of able scholars to extend this statement and to design the logical steps for its refinement, try-out, evaluation, and publication. There are, however, some very practical next steps which can be taken by those of us actively working in student teaching. Using the approach suggested by this statement a number of very much needed related statements could be prepared and made available, for use very soon. Some illustrative topics might include:

a. What learning opportunities should student teaching provide which clearly are not usually present during first year, full-time teaching?

b. What is a sound rationale, based on the best that is known today, for a program of student teaching in small liberal arts colleges, a state college, or a large university?

c. What should be the rationale for the operation of this cooperative enterprise known as student teaching which is jointly conducted by two entirely separate agencies—schools and colleges?

d. What kind of a comprehensive, combined pre-service and in-service program of professional experiences could be constructed based on the best that is known today?

Dr. Clothier has challenged us all to a much more scholarly and professional approach to our task. The essay here is the more remarkable in view of the limited assistance he had during his period of repeated drafts of this statement. The bibliography is a very important part of this contribution. The Committee on Standards wishes to express its appreciation to the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory for publishing this preliminary draft.

L. O. Andrews, Chairman, Committee on Standards for
Professional Laboratory Experiences
The Ohio State University
October, 1966

A THEORETICAL BASIS FOR PROFESSIONAL LABORATORY EXPERIENCES

By Grant Clothier
Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory

If the construction of an adequate theory is a sound basis for developing an intelligent course of action, it must be conceded that most professional laboratory experience programs are indeed built upon uncertain foundations. Although educational critics of the past decade have been gentle in dealing with this phase of teacher education, there is evidence that such kindness is not wholly deserved.

For many years teacher education institutions have required some planned, direct classroom experiences, always including and usually culminating in student teaching. Students generally agree that student teaching is the most important course in the professional educational sequence. Professors, even in academic disciplines, recognize its value, and the most severe critics of teacher education approve student teaching for its common sense reasonableness. Yet, except for a statement by John Dewey[1] in 1904, published attempts to formulate a rationale have been extremely fragmentary and superficial.

The failure of educators to develop a comprehensive theoretical basis upon which to build professional laboratory experiences has resulted in the planning of haphazard and unimaginative programs in many instances. This failure has also hindered efforts to establish valid criteria by which existing programs might be evaluated and has resulted in a great number of widely divergent patterns and practices usually with little or no reasoned rationale for their design.

It should not be inferred that divergent practices in this field are necessarily a vice, nor that uniformity is a virtue. Certainly, goals stemming from a particular theoretical base may be achieved by a variety of methods; but unless there has been a careful delineation of objectives, guided by a well-developed rationale—and these both used as a basis for building a professionally sound and workable design—the resulting program may well turn out to be haphazard and relatively ineffective.

These statements do not imply that all colleges have failed to provide excellent programs of professional laboratory experiences. Examples of effective programs can be found scattered across the nation. However, programs too often have been instruments of expediency resulting from hastily-devised measures to alleviate the pressures of increased enrollments.

Principles and hypotheses drawn from the behavioral sciences logically can be used to produce a theoretical foundation upon which coherent programs of professional laboratory experiences may be built. Experimental programs based on such theory should then be developed, and research undertaken to determine the adequacy of the theory. As research results

[1]Third Year Book of The National Society for the Scientific Study of Education; Part I, 1904. Charles A. McMurry, Editor, Chicago, Illinois, pp. 9-30.

are made available, both theory and practice should be refined as the evidence may warrant. This approach represents the application of sound curriculum development theory to the design of professional laboratory experiences. It would seem to be necessary before realistic standards can be developed and professional laboratory experiences can become truly "professional."

If the need for a theoretical basis is accepted and the sources for developing such a basis can be identified, it should now be possible to state an adequate theory. Fundamentally such a statement should include assumptions concerning the purposes for experiences, describe the characteristics of situations in which experiences occur, and suggest the supportive conditions under which contributions to the accomplishment of the accepted purposes may result.

One of the fundamental purposes of professional laboratory experiences is to enable a prospective teacher to develop an understanding of the teacher's role which will serve effectively as a basis for professional activities. This purpose is in harmony with the philosophical belief that experience can produce values which, if reflected upon and refined, can be used as effective guides for human activities. It is also in harmony with Dewey's conclusion that the discernment of relationships is impossible without experience. Dewey states that, "an ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance."[2] Although Dewey's quantative relationships may be questioned, the conclusion that an integration of theory and practice is necessary for effective learning cannot legitimately be rejected.

An understading of the significance of the term "experience" is essential. In the sense in which it is used here, it implies more than mere doing. One may observe a classroom situation without "seeing" what takes place. One may follow explicitly the directions of an expert without understanding the reasons for such directions or noting the outcomes. One may imitate the techniques of an experienced teacher without perceiving what is happening. Not only must an individual be doing something, but in return something must also happen to him. He must perceive the consequences of his activity. Action should be based upon the desire to achieve an intended goal with a resultant realization of the meanings involved before it can truly be termed an educative experience.

It would seem to follow that the value of experiences in a professional laboratory situation is determined largely by the perceptions of those persons most closely connected with the situation—the student and the classroom teacher. The perceptions of each are personal, subjective, and the result of exposure to past events. Since no two persons have had exactly the same backgrounds, no two persons will perceive a situation in exactly the same way. But, since an individual's actions are based on his perceptions, it is important that he have a broad, varied, and accurate perceptual framework which will provide a basis for intelligent behavior.

[2]Dewey, John, Democracy and Education. The MacMillan Company; New York; 1916, page 169.

Since they are personal and the result of exposure to past events, perceptions cannot be altered by a directive issued within the context of the present situation. Rather, an individual must perceive a difference between his behavior and the demands of the present situation before he can reorganize his perceptual framework. When this reorganization occurs, the individual will most likely be able to change his behavior and thus learn from the experience.

The situation just described is complicated by the fact that each individual does not react independently of other individuals in a social situation. There is also interaction among participants. Thus a student and classroom teacher will react to a given situation not only on the basis of the backgrounds of each, but also on their individual assessments of the situation confronting them. Their behavior is further affected by the perceptions of each as to the meaning of the behavior of the other, and the interpretations each makes as to the goals and expectations of the other. If more than one student is working with a teacher, the interactive relationships become even more complicated, and increasingly so as the "cruciality" of the experience increases.

In any situation involving interactive relationships, that individual occupying the dominant status role has the primary responsibility for creating an environment conducive to learning. Thus, in professional laboratory experiences, whether he realizes it or not, the classroom teacher plays a vital role. He must have a thorough knowledge of the subject matter content in his field and the methods which can be employed effectively in teaching it. He must be secure in his role as a teacher, and must be able to generate a sincere interest in people without becoming emotionally involved. He must be sensitive to the attitudes and feelings of others. In addition, he must be able to create situations which will enable students to develop insights based upon perceptions gained from their experiences.

Such a person will enable a student to maintain or enhance his feelings of self-adequacy. If the teacher is a secure person with feelings of self-worth, dignity, and confidence; he will tend to encourage the development of a similar, positive self-concept in a student. A student with these feelings will then be in a better position to perceive situations objectively and enlarge his perceptual framework.

Considerable evidence is now accumulating to indicate the extreme importance and effect of the student's basic self-concepts and of his own perception of himself in the teacher's role—his own construct of an ideal teacher. A positive, mature self-concept seems to be a major factor in increasing both the rate and amount of personal and professional growth. The placement of a student for his student teaching assignment may have a major bearing on his success. Unless the student's perception of the teacher's role is compatible with the classroom situation in which he is placed, or unless he can modify his perceptual framework to achieve compatibility, the experience will have little positive value.

Since the purpose of professional laboratory experiences is to promote learning, situations must be developed wherein an individual may gain

realistic insights concerning the many facets of a teacher's role. Opportunities must be provided for students to observe the consequences of actions based on these insights as they are tested in an operational situation. Realistically, high level learning occurs as the student is confronted with a problem situation, decides on a course of action, and follows through. Since the teacher cannot learn for the student nor effect behavior change simply by issuing directions or commands, it would seem to follow that situations where a student is required always to imitate the specific techniques of his teacher will provide a very low level of learning. Rather it is the teacher's responsibility to provide situations where insights may be developed; to support the student as he carries out his professional duties; and to assist him in the analysis of these experiences. In this manner the learning process can best be facilitated.

Professional laboratory experiences which attempt to anticipate and duplicate every situation a prospective teacher might conceivably face in his professional career obviously cannot be provided. And, since each student operates within his own perceptual framework, it would follow that not all students will be able to generalize from professional laboratory experiences with equal facility. Neither will all students benefit equally from the same amount and types of experiences. However, these experiences must be of such quantity and variety as to provide ample opportunity for the student to perceive the value of the experiences and develop generalizations from them. If the student perceives the laboratory experiences as similar to actual classroom situations which he will face after assuming the independent role of a qualified teacher, maximum benefit hopefully will be gained from such experiences. Under conditions such as these, students should be able to develop some professional competence to make decisions based on available evidence and to build a reasonable level of self-confidence.

If the conclusions that have been reached have some validity they may be useful in serving as a starting point for developing professional laboratory experiences. From this rationale, specific statements can be formulated in terms of testable hypotheses which will serve as the basis for additional research. Educators most intimately connected with professional laboratory experiences should initiate a critical examination of their programs in terms of this or some other defensible theoretical foundation. The demands for excellence in teacher education are too great for such a vital segment of the program to be left to chance.

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